

## Comment to the Federal Communications Commission

Issue: Newspaper/Broadcast Cross-Ownership Ban, Docket No. 06-121

I believe that the current ban on owning a newspaper and broadcast outlet in the same market should be kept in place, despite some arguments that they are not necessary.

According to the FCC web site, the current rule on cross-ownership states that no company can own a broadcast station and daily newspaper if they are distributed in the same area. The web site also says that the FCC would like comments about what should be done with this ban, and if “the differences between television and radio broadcast operations are significant in the context of common ownership with a newspaper.” I myself am a journalist of sorts. Though still in college, I am considering journalism as a career and have worked at both a newspaper and radio station in the Quad-Cities area. Having worked as a reporter at both a daily newspaper and a public radio station, I can’t imagine how having both outlets owned by the same company would benefit our readers (or listeners).

Though I have covered similar events or issues at both places, there were also some major differences in what types of events were covered. My editor at the newspaper and my newsroom director at the radio station had different priorities when it came to what stories were the most important and what events should be covered. It could be argued that these were due in part to different audiences or to my supervisors’ personal feelings or biases, but that is beside the point. The point is that someone reading the daily paper and someone listening to the morning news broadcast would get different information, and this is a good thing. People benefit from this diversity of viewpoints because they can get different information about different topics concerning local issues. If the radio station and the newspaper were to be owned by the same company, and if there was the same person deciding who and what could get coverage, people in this area would all get the same coverage of the same information. In Robert McChesney and John Nichols’ 2003 article “The Public Revolts Against Monopoly Media,” the authors elaborate refer to this effect as “Wal-Martization,” saying the public outcry to the 2003 FCC proposed rules is due to the fact that “Americans recognize that their media are experiencing digital Wal-Martization.” A 2003 research study from the Pew Research Center reinforces the fact that the public does not want media cross-ownership. The study found that fifty percent of people thought relax cross-ownership restrictions would negatively impact the country.

With different media ownership, people will receive news from diverse viewpoints, because reporters at separate organizations will take different angles on stories, which will benefit their audiences because they’ll be able to get a variety information from different sources. If the news was all the

same, people would receive the same information about the same events from all their local media outlets. Audiences already receive similar coverage of national and global news due to the use of wire services, but local events is where local media can actually accomplish original and diverse coverage. However, if all the local media were owned by the same company, there's a good chance this diversity would be taken away.

Another reason I don't feel the ban should be lifted is because I don't think there any good reasons to do so. In an article titled "The Consumer Federation of America, Consumers Union and Free Press Release Six New Research Studies That Dismantle Big Media's Case for Abandoning FCC Ownership Protections" on a web site maintained by the Free Press, the case for lifting the ban is outlined, and the authors systematically poke holes in each of the arguments. According to the article, big media companies have three arguments for lifting the ban: (1) Traditional media companies are not doing well financially, (2) Internet and cable news outlets negate the idea of ownership rules, and (3) Media consolidation will not harm anyone, but in reality will provide benefits.

Against the first argument, the article says media companies underreport their earnings by only reporting odd-numbered years, which conveniently leaves out years when elections and Olympic events take place. This claim is also supported in McChesney and Nichols' article, where they compare big media companies to Wal-mart. They write, "Like the chain that earns billions but cannot be bothered to pay employee health benefits, major media concerns in the United States brag about their profits on Wall Street, but still cry poor when it comes to covering the news that matters to Wall Street." If anything, McChesney and Nichols' argue, media consolidation will lead to fewer jobs in the field, because companies will need less people to cover the same events. This will also decrease viewpoint diversity if the same person is covering the state government for all the local media outlets, resulting in what is referred to in the article as "one-size-fits-all news that is a lot more likely to serve the people in power than it is the public interest and democracy."

Contrary to the argument about Internet and cable news outlets, the Free Press article says that people are not all turning to these news outlets, and in reality use them only to supplement their traditional news viewing or reading. Also, only a small portion of people visit independently owned news site; most visit the online counterpart of their traditional news outlets, where they get similar information from the same source.

On the third point, the article makes the same claim I made earlier – that consolidating media ownership will "deprive the public of diverse sources of local news."

In conclusion, I think the cross-ownership ban should remain in place because it guarantees that people will have diversity in their local news sources, and will avoid a homogenized flow of information from local news

outlets. The ban ensures that local news outlets will be owned by different companies, and therefore have different leadership and priorities, enabling the public to hear about different issues from their local media.

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